

Free thought

THE LARGEST CIRCULATED RATIONALIST MONTHLY

THOUGHT FOR THE MONTH :

Believing is easier than thinking.
Hence so many more believers
than thinkers

—BRUCE CALVERT

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God is a myth; immortality an illusion; Religion, a gigantic fraud

Letters

OPERATION IN DREAM

Sir: Here is a news item which appeared in the famous Telugu Daily "Andhra Jyothi" on 3-4-1977 duly translated:

"Surgical operations in dreams for chronic diseases of devotees by the Yadagiri Bhagvan, Sri Lakshmi-Narasimhaswamy.

Hyderabad, April 1—Mr. Challa Subbarayudu, Minister for Municipal Affairs, told in the State Assembly that the above idol of Yadagiri Gutta, 40 KM. from here, appeared in dreams of his devotees and performed surgical operations on those suffering from chronic diseases, thus relieving them of their pain. Mr. Subbarayudu stated during question hour that he himself saw the 'operation marks'. Mr. Subbarayudu also said that the temple authorities were making special arrangements for the devotees who came from far off places for getting operated by the God."

If the above were true, the Andhra Pradesh Government could close the medical colleges and discontinue surgical operations in government hospitals. Surgeons in Andhra Pradesh and elsewhere will become unemployed overnight. Surgical instrument industry can stop production !!

Look at the contradiction. If the operation is to be performed in a dream, why do they make special arrangements for devotees to come to Yadagiri Gutta?

P. Bheemanna, Nellore

Sir: Cannot a devotee dream in his own house even 4000 miles away? Cannot the idol cure without operations?

Will the Andhra Government investigate and expose the hoaxers before gullible patients lose their lives and money?

Dr. S. D. Sudarsanam, Machilipatnam.

[On receipt of the above letters, we have taken up the matter with the Hon. Minister and we await his reply. Editor]

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FREETHOUGHT

Sir: I am encouraged to see the improvements in FREETHOUGHT both as regards the reading matter and the get up.

S. Ghosh, Delhi
(Former President of I.R.A.)

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AN ENGINEER BEMOANS

I congratulate Mr. V. T. Rajshekara Shetty in analysing the Sai Baba controversy precisely (FREETHOUGHT February '77). He has rightly pointed out that, inspite of having the third largest scientific community in the world, we lack the scientific outlook. The scientists and engineers have lost so much of confidence in themselves that a religious ceremony invariably precedes every installation and every stage of it. Why not people do away with designers and maintenance engineers and depend solely upon the super natural power!

Scientists and intellectuals bow down lamely before God-men due to sheer lack of confidence in themselves. It is high time they come forward unitedly to save themselves from further humiliation.

AN AGGRIEVED ENGINEER,
Kalpakkam

Free thought

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Editorial

OLD WINE IN NEW BOTTLE

In India, changes are not rapid. Now we have proved that we will not only apply the brake but put the vehicle in the reverse gear if rapid (?) changes are attempted. We would change the changers rather than change ourselves.

What were the apparent reasons for throwing out the old rulers? In the socially and educationally backward states of U.P., Bihar and Madhya Pradesh there were 'excesses' in implementing the family planning programme! So 'democrats' have rushed to the rescue of 'hapless' victims! In a superstition-ridden country, instead of stating that there is nothing sacred about conception or procreation, a

whole government has been thrown out. Will it not boomerang on the country? We are already witnessing a pseudo-socialist minister feeding the conservative dailies with front-page 'assurances' and exhortations to 'Brahmacharya' and all the nonsense that goes with it.

Instead of true secularism being made an article of faith with the people, the leader among the leaders and others took their oath of office in the name of the non-existent god. Their religious practices 'prove' that they are paragons of virtue! How much more of hypocrisy are we going to tolerate?

We are not sorry for the change in itself. The new group is mainly drawn from the old. It contains as many 'pseudos' as the old, only it belongs to an earlier generation. It also contains the hard core who, in the name of a status quo constitution, may drop 'secularism' and 'socialism' from it. To them 'democracy' consists in propagating the views of the few rich and not the economic liberation

of the millions. Rationalists beware! Rise now to defend our convictions.

Our fear is not imaginary. We understand that the beauracracy is full of Sai Baba devotees and status quoists. It has to be the establishment against the rationalist movement, Sai Baba vs. Kovoov—a long, arduous journey indeed.



FORTHCOMING SPECIAL NUMBERS

The June 1977 issue of FREETHOUGHT will be a special number on Astrology, Palmistry, Numerology etc.

The July 1977 issue will be brought out as a Bible special and that of August 1977 as Sankaracharya special.

Please reserve your copies with your agents. If there is no agent at your place, send your subscription directly to us. Agency applications will be entertained at places where there are no agents.

PROFILE OF A PRIME MINISTER

1. Here is 'Karma' theory for you!

"No one can stop what happens according to the laws of god. The things that happen to one are the results of one's past actions."

(From the preface to the 'Story of My Life').

Do we then need the police and the law courts? Even a government is superfluous!

2. Here is "Women's Lib" for you!

"Women are not fit to become Prime Ministers"

(In an interview to a foreign magazine)

Upto the Deputy Prime Minister-ship and no farther!

3. Here is 'Democracy'!

"I have always sought the blessings of god which are more important than anything else in life; but God I do not see, I see the people. It is the people who are god to me."

(In a message to the nation over A.I.R. on 24-3-77)

Why not call our nation a 'GODACRACY'? Mr. Desai presides over a government of the god, by the god and for the god!

THE RAJANEESH HOAX

K. THANKAPPAN, Bombay

[The author is the President of the
Trombay Rationalist Association
and live-wire rationalist Ed.]

Mr. Rajaneesh in his rejoinder to Dr. Kovoov's interview published in Current Weekly concedes that he is a Jew doing a business. His endeavour to protect his despised disciples from the scientific approach of rationalists is an explicit vindication of collusive aggression on the masses. Either in the name of business or under catharisis and meditation a gentleman should not propagate unscientific and deceptive perceptions misguiding the people to make a living. I would very much appreciate if he or any of his disciples could demonstrate supernatural powers at a public place under fraud-proof conditions.

Mr. Rajaneesh claims that his disciples scream and shreak, shout and dance and go mad but when 'Chaithanya' orders 'Stop' they stop. Such phenomena are hypnosis and he and his followers have misconceived it as an effect of 'Kundalini' meditation. With the technique of concentration and rythmic stimulation of auditory centres of the brain, man often falls into a trance and passes on to a somnambulistic stage where he enjoys certain hallucinations either as the result of his preconcept or at the suggestion of the hypnotist. The suggestions are thought to be the orders of the hypnotist and the subjects show great enthusiasm to execute them. People feel fear to disobey even post-hypnotic suggestion and they often have a guilty conscience in case they fail to observe the instructions given under hypnosis. Such perceptions are identified with the wrong concept of experiencing self, truth, god, supernatural powers, clairvoyance etc. We can demonstrate all these phenomena, explained by Mr. Rajaneesh as the effect of 'Kundalini' meditation, on subjects under hypnosis. We can make them scream and shreak, dance and go mad. Even we can make them withdraw mind from the senses and senses from the objects of their gratification. Mr. Rajaneesh has described the children of around fourteen years of age as fit for meditation. They are generally good subjects for hypnotic induction. When we say 'stop' all the subjects will 'stop' and they will come back to obey the next order. There is nothing like chaithanya or supernatural power in it. It is only a procedure which Mr. Rajaneesh is using to exploit the gullible followers. In a hypnotic induction it is a temporary derangement of the brain derangement. Out of ignorance our

ancestors conceived it as introspection, self consciousness etc., and passed on the idea to us through religion and traditions. MIND IS THE FUNCTION OF BRAIN AND THE ELECTRO CHEMICAL ACTIVITY THAT GOES ON IN THE BRAIN IS RESPONSIBLE FOR OUR THINKING.

Mr. Rajaneesh reproduces the scientific idea that matter cannot be annihilated and distorts it with his wrong notion. It is for his benefit to understand that matter which cannot be annihilated has no end. The universe is amoral and purposeless. 'The Law of Energy Conservation' embodies conservation of matter. What we observe is cent per cent material. Matter and energy are indestructible and endless. Endless needs no beginning and as such no creator. Thus the basic idea of theologians of a creator or god is absurd. The very idea of god is founded only on our profound ignorance. The theological arguments that the universe is being controlled by a supernatural power cannot be true. It is ridiculous to believe that an intelligent creator had planned all the catastrophe caused by flood, drought, cyclone, sunstroke, bacterial and virus infection. It is impossible to believe that every thing in the universe functions very orderly. A living organism lives on the other and the stronger rules the weaker. Even in inanimate matter change seems to be permanent. There are countless collisions that goes on even in our galaxy.

The soul idea is not accepted by science. Primitive man gave soul to sun, moon and planets. Later they gave it to mountains, rivers, stones and idols. Judaism, Christianity and Islam gave soul to man only. But

even before the advent of Christianity and Islam on this planet, Gowthama Buddha propounded the theory that even man has no soul or atma. If soul is in all living organism there must be a soul in a rose plant and in a worm as well, but when they are cut in two pieces and each piece grown into an independent plant or a worm one cannot imagine that there is a fraction of soul in each piece. There are many a faculty which man does not possess but the animals and insects do. A dog can smell a criminal, but men cannot. A beheaded cockroach cannot only survive for some more days but it can distinguish heat, cold, male and female. When we talk about the existence of a soul, it is worth remembering the story of Professor Ryle of the University of California. A rustic was shown an automotive for the first time. He was very much pleased to see it and appreciated its function. But he believed there were horses inside to pull it. They opened the engine and showed him that there was no horse. The peasant still clung to the idea that there may be invisible horses". This is the state of affairs with the blind believers of soul, spirit and supernatural powers. Thus Dr. Kovoov says "that the human life is more sacred than that of a cow or that of a mango tree is all utter nonsense".

Mr. Rajaneesh asks whether Dr. Kovoov has experienced death to enable him to say that there is no life after death. Has Mr. Rajaneesh experienced death to establish that there is life after death? Life is an energy produced by the body by oxidising the fuel during respiration. This definition applies to all living organisms including Mr. Rajaneesh.

He cannot survive without food, oxygen and his body. If he is sure that he can come back after his death at his will, let him demonstrate it by stopping breath for one hour or remain without food and water for a month or clotting his blood circulation by stopping heart beats for half an hour.

Again Mr. Rajaneesh repudiates all other cults, such as Krishna-consciousness, Hare Krishna etc., and god-men like Satya Saibaba and holds that his cult Catharisis is genuine and revolutionary. Such attitude evidently is egoistic generally seen among religious founders. Mr. Rajaneesh is no exception. Non-believers of Christianity, it is taught to the followers, has no place in heaven. All those who are non-Islamic are kaffirs (devils) who can never enter into heaven, it is said. All such nonsensical ideas are the product of religious authorities which are being instilled in the minds of credulous followers. We, the rationalists, condemn all such ideas and request the people to verify all such claims. The right of humanism, scientific temper and a spirit of enquiry are some of the fundamental duties of Indian Citizen. Let us verify all the dogmas, delusive and deceptive perceptions thrust upon us.

Though Israel is trying to rehabilitate all its countrymen in their own state Mr. Rajaneesh does not seem to leave this country, because I presume that this is the place where numerous gullibles who can be easily created in the name of god, supernatural, meditation etc. It is high time that we woke up, bring to book all these characters who are out to hood-wink the credulous innocents. In the annals of history we see the fight among religions and the fight between science, and religions. Gallelio

and Bruno were persecuted by inquisition for endorsing the Copernican theory that the earth and the other planets revolve around the central sun. Dr. Bhattacharya, well known anthropologist says, 'When Mariah was being dragged to death in the jungles of East India, the scientists, who committed the mistake of learning mathematics and investigating the locations of the stars in the night sky, were burnt alive by the order of church leaders in the towns of Europe. Religion and authority have during the whole historic period, acted as the media to sanction all sorts of cruelty. The virgin sacrifice among the Moabillitires (300 B.C.) the Cythian royal burials with slave sacrifices (60 B.C.) the jew slaughter of Europeans are but a few examples'. When Sati was banned an overwhelming majority of Brahmins protested against it at Calcutta.

In a nutshell, let Mr. Rajaneesh, his disciples or any other person come forward and face the challenge of A. T. Kovoov and prove beyond doubt the existence of god, soul, supernatural and meditation powers, yogic powers, palmistry and astrology and a host of other ideas full of sound and fury signifying nothing. Evading verification of the claims under some lame excuse explicitly denotes the countrivance behind it. Till some one bring up any of Dr. Kovoov's challenges, his rationalist conclusion that "All those who claim to posses supernatural powers are either charlatans or mentally deranged persons and the palmists and astrologers are gamblers" has to be agreed upon.



NUN KILLS HER BABY

The defendant is Sister Maureen Murphy, 37, a Roman Catholic nun. The charge, as set forth by the Monroe County Grand Jury in New York State is:

On or about April 27, 1976 Sister Maureen "with intent to cause the death of another person, to wit, a male infant known as Baby Boy Murphy, did cause the death of such person under circumstances which do not constitute murder because the defendant was acting under the influence of extreme emotional disturbance."

THE PRETTY NUN.

Sister Maureen is no more than 5 feet, with a full figure, cropped brown hair, no make-up, delicate colouring and pretty. She wears softly tailored dresses and a cross.

She has a sweet face, with a look of compassion.

At 37 she has been a nun for 18 years, teaching most of that time. In recent years she taught at a montessori school and in April, 1976 had almost completed her first year as the school's director. She has been out on bail, her address unknown, since her release from the hospital soon after the birth.

UNWANTED BABY

According to the Prosecutor Mr. Valentine's opening statement, on the morning of April 27, 1976, Sister Maureen got up at our Lady of Lourdes Convent in a suburb of of Rachester, New York, and explained to Sister Kathleen Carroll, the coordinator of the house, that she had severe stomach problems and would be unable to go to school.

The other nuns (there were 12 living there) left the convent, the baby was born 'probably just before noon, full term. Around noon one nun returned; to the convent for supplies and Sister Maureen saw her from her room, probably heard her come in.

BODY IN THE BASKET

"After nine months of pregnancy, after nine months of continually hiding that pregnancy and dodging questions about her condition, after lying to the other nuns about going to a doctor, now, seeing the baby alive before her, and now hearing the baby beginning to cry In this state of extreme emotional disturbance she thrust a pair of panties down the baby's throat as far as she could, wrapped him in a nightgown and "discarded" him in a waste basket" said the Prosecutor.

She began to bleed profusely after the birth because there was no one to attend her; she tried to cleanse herself in the bathroom and finally collapsed in her bedroom.

He said when the nuns found her later that afternoon she protested their calling an ambulance and once in hospital, "constantly and consistently denied pregnancy and giving birth" until there could be no denial when she passed a placenta. That, he said, led to the discovery of the infant boy, found

THE PSYCHIC-PLANT FALLACY

Do Plants respond to Music?

JOHN K. SRICKLAND

(John K. Srickland Jr., is a researcher in Plant Genetics and specializes in Plant tissue culture—Ed.)

One of the most popular occult ideas of the last few years is the psychic-plant fallacy. Originating at the time of the occult boom in the 1970s as the "plants respond to music" concept, it has mushroomed into a minor sensation, resulting in several books and frequent references in cartoons, on TV talk, shows, and in the press.

Most persons who try to debunk such fallacies are helpless, because they are specialists in only one or two areas that relate to the fallacy and are laymen in all the rest.

For instance, specialities that relate to the plant fallacy include botany, biochemistry, histology, horticulture, physiology, physics, photography and zoology. The quacks may use distortions, fabrications, and fallacious reasoning in their claims and may not mention existing data that undermine their position. When challenged, they will shift to a discussion of some area unfamiliar to the skeptic. To counter such tactics successfully, the critic must either (1) be personally knowledgeable in all related specialities, (2) have an expert in each speciality ready to back him up, or (3) have immediate access to the required information and arguments in printed form.

(Continued from page 108)

in a waste basket behind a bookcase in Sister Maureen's room.

'SHED SYMPATHY'

He asked the Judge to "Shed the cloak of sympathy and treat this case like any other".

"Our proof will show at relevant times the accused suffered an acute blood loss and other physiological difficulties", the defence counsel said. In effect, he said, these factors "deprived her of any cognitive faculties".

Carol Murphy the male parent of the baby entered the Sisters of St. Joseph in 1957 when nuns wore severe habits, left the convent only in pairs, conferred regularly with their 'Mother Superior'. They took vows of poverty, chastity and obedience and these vows were supposed to set the pattern for their lives.

'NOT GUILTY'

At the end of the hearing Sister Maureen was found not guilty of murdering her newborn son. A doctor testified that she had inadequate control of her faculties at the time. □

The psychic-plant fallacy actually contains three major ideas: (1) that plants possess human or animal capacities; (2) that they have psychic, or psi, powers; and (3) that they are endowed with mystical or supernatural qualities other than ESP.

The human or animal qualities claimed or implied for plants include the following: a nervous system and brain, memory, senses, rapid purposeful movement, intelligence, emotions, pain, and volition or will. Since histologists first began identifying cell and tissue types in the nineteenth century, they have been unable to discover nervous tissue in plants. Nerves function by transmitting electrical impulses; they are not hollow, like blood vessels. They have one or more layers of insulating sheathing and specialized junctions called synapses, where the impulses are passed from one cell to the next. The functions of all cells in some species of plants have been identified, and no sheathed nerves or cells have been found.

Sessile plants have no need for a nervous system, since they cannot flee from danger. Instead, they have evolved other protective devices, such as spines, stinging hairs, poisonous alkaloids, protective coloration, rapid wilting, and so on. Rapid wilting, for example, occurs in *Mimosa*, a genus of plants such as Venus's-flytrap that have developed substitutes for nerves and muscles. These mechanisms, operating literally by hydraulic pressure, allow rapid movement in one direction only. Hormones, which are released at the point of contact when the plant is touched by an insect or animal, diffuse rapidly to hinge points, where they release the internal pressure of certain pulvinus cells.

The leaf or trap is thus rapidly closed, but it opens quite slowly as the pressure in the cells is gradually restored.

Except for plants of this type, and those with "spring-loaded" mechanisms, such as *Catesetum* orchids, all plant motion is slow and depends on growth, not muscular contraction. Growth movements are affected by external factors, such as light direction, along with biological rhythms and growth patterns, determined by the plant's genes. For instance, a stem bends toward light because the unlit side, in response to hormone concentrations, grows more rapidly than the lit side. This questing motion, often seen in time-lapse movies of plants, is entirely chemical in origin. In fact, due to the rigid structure produced in the walls of the growing cells by cellulose, no movement can occur after growth has ceased, except at the special structures noted above.

The psychic powers claimed for plants include telepathy, clairvoyance, telekinesis, and reception of psychic energy. Much of this is based on a single accidental experiment performed by Cleve Backster, a polygraph expert. He claims, for example, to detect the emotional and physical responses of plants to human thoughts. None of his claims have ever been substantiated by reputable scientists, even though many have tried sincerely to duplicate his experiments. When others visit his lab, or try these experiments themselves, excuses are ready for the inevitable failures: (i) plants "faint" in the presence of a scientist who often has to destroy plants during his regular investigations; (2) the polygraph electrodes may be "short-circuited" by damage to the plant

they are attached to; (3) the experimenter must have an open mind or be in communication with the plant being tested, or the plant won't co-operate; (4) plants sometimes "faint" under stress caused by the testing.

Backster and others ignore basic research rules, such as parsimony, that require use of the simplest possible explanation and assurance of repeatability. These rules are especially important where new, unusual, or controversial results or ideas are involved.

As for the existence of PSI effects themselves, a recent article by Martin Gardner points out the raw truth: many of the positive parapsychology results being published are fraudulent, the result of data-tampering or improperly controlled experiments. The advent of specially designed random-number machines for ESP tests has made it easy for scientists to show that during controlled experiments with plants no PSI activity has ever been detected.

The other powers claimed for plants include intelligent control of organ and tissue development, transmutation of chemical elements, and possession of a life force and an "aura," or energy field, of "bioradiation." We can be quite specific here. It has been shown repeatedly that development is controlled by genes and the environment, not by intelligence, which requires a nervous system. For example, lethal deformities caused by mutations would not occur if plants were intelligent and could control their own development.

Transmutation of chemical elements by living systems is impossible, because the energies in the chemical reactions of living tissues are far too weak to cause nuclear reactions. Only such reactions can affect the

nuclei of atoms, allowing transmutation. Natural transmutations initiated by radioactivity decay and cosmic particles occur constantly in living tissue, but the numbers involved are far too small to supply biological deficiencies, as is claimed.

The life force is supposedly detected by Kirlian photography, where electricity is used to outline on film objects with corona discharge. The difference in patterns left by living and dead leaves, for instance, is the result of minor changes in technique by the photographer. The power of suggestions has also undoubtedly affected many people who claimed to feel the aura or psychic-energy field of plants.

The last items suggest that the main reason for belief in the fallacy is the reemergence of vitalism and what could be termed neo-animism as religious philosophies. Vitalists believe that life cannot be explained completely by chemistry and physics; animism is the oldest form of religious belief on the planet, in which spirits are believed to inhabit animals, plants, streams, mountains, and other natural phenomena. Belief is also sometimes stimulated by the desire for companionship—the comfort of feeling surrounded by sentient, sympathetic beings or pets, rather than by mindless vegetables.

The main cause of the promotion of this fallacy is simply the desire for financial gain and recognition by quacks, authors, and publishers. Apparently thinking plants are not as sensational as the Bermuda Triangle—a subject about which almost twenty books have appeared in the past two years. Such books are heavily padded with nonrelated

occult and pseudoscientific material, and explanations are made in gobbledegook unworthy of even the worst science-fiction hack work.

The main effect of the wide and growing belief in the psychic-plant fallacy is the reinforcement of all aspects of the occult—nonrational world view. This results in increased distrust and rejection of science and technology as problem-solving methods that benefit people. For example, what if politi-

cians had believed in psychic plants and had spent money on communicating with them, rather than on breeding them. The green revolution would never have happened, and millions of people would have starved to death.

Plants are beautiful and intricate products of natural evolution; they should be enjoyed for what they are, not for what some wish them to be.

Courtesy: "The Humanist", U.S.A.



WE ARE ATHEISTS, BECAUSE:

A good God would be useless if he were not powerful.

A powerful God would not deserve worship if he were not good.

There is no all-powerful good God, otherwise, there would be no imperfection.

If this is the best World God can make, the stories of Heaven must be lies.

GODISM was invented in the earliest days of man's ignorance. It is incredible that primitive man guessed wrongly about everything else, but discovered the truth about the origin of life.

GODISM is consistent with crime, cruelty, envy, hatred, malice and uncharitableness.

Courtesy: AMERICAN ATHEISTS

RATIONALIST STUDY COURSE

May we recall that the study course is between 13th May and 15th May, '77. Venue: 28, Pantheon Road, Egmore, Madras-8. Enrol now to learn more about the basis and ramifications of Rationalism to counter effectively the arguments of theists.

PSYCHO-SOMATIC STRUCTURE OF MIRACLES

P. K. NARAYANAN

[The author is vice President of IRA, advisor to Nagpur Rationalist Association and a regular contributor to 'FREETHOUGHT'. The following is a shorter version of the paper presented at the All India Atheist Convention held at Nidamarolu in Jan, 1977—Ed.]

SHANKARACHARYA'S MIRACLE

Sri Shankaracharya of Sringeri Math, speaking to Pressmen on 1-1-1977 at Nagpur, said that 'miracle' was a wrongly interpreted term. He admitted that most of the so-called miracles were tricks of magic. But he retained a soft corner for what he termed as a 'real miracle'.

His holiness continued : 'in front of Sringeri Math flows the river Tunga ; his Holiness has set up a gate and wanted to have a wooden bridge constructed across the river for the convenience of visiting devotees ; but the depth of the river at that particular spot somehow prevented construction of the bridge ; the recent floods in the river brought heaps of sand and deposited it on the exact spot and thus filled up the depth which enabled the Math officials to construct the bridge'.

If a deep pit in a river-bed is filled up by sand brought in by torrential currents of a heavy flood, that constitutes a miracle of the god almighty. If the air-borne clouds bring in rains in an area, it amounts to a miracle attributable to the gracious act of god.

If in an air-crash, a train accident or a natural calamity, hundreds of thousands of people die and one or two survive death, it is a miracle—no matter whether such escapes could be easily understood as being the results of explicable natural reason !

WHAT IS A MIRACLE ?

An event or an occurrence beyond the level of being objectively understood by an individual or a group of individuals at a given time can be said to be a miracle.

From this definition, it follows that occurrence of a miracle depends upon an individual or a group of individuals, which experience it. It also presupposes that the basic attributes of a miracle revolve around the cerebral attitude and environmental conditions of the perceiver.

For example, in the instance quoted by

the Shankaracharya any normal intelligent person can realise that the deep pit in the river bed was filled up by the soil brought in by the flood waters and that there was nothing unnatural about it. But to attribute such a very ordinary occurrence to supernatural happening, one should have extra-ordinary fascinations of a deranged mental condition.

All these mental conditions are the results of peculiar working states of the central nervous system. Before distinguishing these mental states, it is necessary to examine the cognitive activity of the brain with particular reference to the twin processes of Perception and Conception.

SENSATIONS

The process of reflection of the objective reality of the outside world which takes place in the brain begins with sensations. The brain does not act directly with the objects outside but through peripheral and internal receptors or sense organs. Sensation is the primary mental condition produced by the cerebral cortex as a result of stimulations caused by the endings of the sensory nerves on account of the external or internal objects.

Thus sensation is the initial stage of cognitive activity. It is elementary in nature because a sensation does not portray the object as a whole but reflects the individual qualities, for example, white, soft, black, smooth, rough etc. It is an extremely unspecific generality without resort to characterisation of an object in full. White may be a property of snow or paper or chalk. Therefore when we speak of a white object, it indicates only one of its several properties based on an elementary visual sensation.

PERCEPTION

But the process of reflection of objective reality does not stop at the initial stage. A person perceives not only the individual qualities of an object but the object itself as a whole. This process of mental activity by which the entire complex phenomena are reflected involving unity and judgement, not only individual properties of an object but the object in its entirety is known as perception.

Everything we see, hear or feel around us, is reflected through the act of perception. But the process of perception should be properly understood. Though it is reflection of all complex properties, it should not be considered that perception is a mechanical 'taking together' or 'summing up' of various individual qualities of the object. Perception is a higher stage in the process of cognition and though individual qualities form the totality of perception, they are not added up mechanically but are integrated into a single unified image of the real object.

When we perceive a thing or matter, that perception leaves behind in the brain traces of images of varying vividness and when the encounter is over, one can reproduce these images. The facts of a person we have met or of a melody we have heard may be reproduced after the person met has gone or melody has ceased.

CONCEPTION

When a child starts growing, his mental development also starts. But in the early stages of growth, the images cast in its brain are very poor and unclear. As the child grows, it starts developing the Second Signal System (speech) and as a result his world of

images gets gradually enriched. In adulthood perceptions become clear and with the fully developed second signal system, the adult becomes capable of generalisation and segregation of concrete images. Similar objects and phenomena are then given common names corresponding to their qualities. This process of forming separate and abstract ideas of objects is Conception. Conception can also reflect qualities which cannot be accessible to sense organs. Concepts are always expressed in words. Without words concepts cannot exist. Only human beings could have concepts. Concepts are foreign to animals and birds. 'Matter, gas, modesty, blue etc., are expressions of concepts.

FORMATION OF JUDGEMENTS

In this transformation of cognitive function, we have seen that perception, images and concepts are formed in the brain. But these themselves do not complete the cognitive function of the brain. They remain disintegrated, formless and meaningless. They have got to be assessed and adjudged. Here comes 'judgement' for the rescue. Judgement establishes the relation of the objects and phenomena of the reality on the basis of percepts, images and concepts. This is the final stage of cognitive function. The expression such as "Swan is white, Sky is blue, it will rain tomorrow" et al are all judgements.

From the above explanations we should not imagine that the cognitive function is a long drawn out process. It is the speediest of all processes one can imagine. The rise of a sensation requires only the time needed for a nerve impulse to travel from the site

of peripheral stimulation of a sensory nerve ending to the cell of the corresponding analyser in the cerebral cortex. It is instantaneous and spontaneous. The perception and understanding of what a person sees, hears or in short senses and performs are an integral and dynamically indivisible process.

Now, with the above analysis of the cognitive functions of the brain, we can examine the disturbances that affect cognitive activities and how they, at certain given situations, end up in miracles.

Dealing with miracles, we are essentially confronted with two major categories of cognitive disturbances and they are popularly known as illusions and hallucinations. These two phenomena almost always appear on the edifices of delusional images built up in the brain centres.

ILLUSIONS

An illusion may be defined as a distorted or false perception of an existing thing or matter. The deceptive perception called illusion need not necessarily be the result of a serious derangement of the cerebral function. Even healthy persons may get illusions, as for example, seeing of mirages, a spoon immersed in water appearing to be broken at the middle etc., are illusions of a healthy brain. Normal persons may also have sensory illusions due to superficial attention or vague perception because of poor illumination or bad audibility. Changes in affective states such as extreme fear, anxiety, devotion et al may also cause illusions. But the major or serious occurrence of illusions takes place in cases of mental derangements where the illusions are symptomatic of mental diseases and are the results of deranged consciousness.

Why after all illusions occur and in what circumstances? They take place (either in a healthy person or in a mentally sick person) when the nervous hemispheres and its working are obliterated or reduced. At that time, the cells in the cerebral cortex are completely or partially in a hypnotic phase.

HALLUCINATIONS

Hallucinations are entirely imaginary or fabricated perceptions. Their main peculiarity is the complete absence of any real object of perception or real stimulation of sense organs. Nevertheless these false perceptions appear to be real and to have external projection. The imaginary objects occupy the same position in space as real objects and finally are so apparent to the perceiver that he relishes no doubts about the reality of what he sees, hears or experiences.

Hallucinations can be elementary and complex in appearance and intensity. They are the results of conditions of mental derangement. They occur when the cerebral cortex is in a transitory state of hypnotic phase when the cells pass from wakefulness to partial or complete inhibition. They take place as a consequence of the process of inhibition setting in over the cerebral cortex. It may be stressed here that there was a time when Physiologists believed that hallucinations were caused by excitation of sense centres in the cerebral cortex. There is a section of the Physiologists who still holds the view strongly. But it is found that when mental patients suffering from various hallucinatory disorders were given caffeine, a chemical substance which enhances excitation, their hallucinations diminished considerably. On the other hand, application of bromides which intensifies inhibition resulted in the abnormal increase of hallucinatory perceptions.

MIRACLES AND HALLUCINATIONS

All miracles in whatever way and style they are explained or experienced or stated to have been experienced can be the results of either illusions or hallucinations of the perceivers.

Hallucinations are highly individualistic perceptions and hence most of the miracles of hallucinatory origin are individualistic experiences and such miracles propagate through individualistic expressions.

It is common among believers of infallible conviction and devotion to perceive visions or to "see" gods, mythological figures, saints and angels according to their delusional beliefs. Extreme belief forces these devotees to concentrate on a particular thought process which induce a sort of inhibition of certain areas of their cerebral cortex. During the transitory state from wakefulness to trance and or complete inhibition, the persons get hallucinatory perceptions. These would be corresponding to their delusion. A christian believer might perceive crucifix while a Hindu follower might get the visions of Krishna or his "Leelas". If a story goes that Lord Krishna appeared before Bhakta Meera, there is nothing untrue about the expressions because as for Meera, it would have been a 'real' experience though it was not a real reflection of objective truth. A hallucination is a real experience as far as the perceiver is concerned, but it cannot be an expression of reality and a reflection of objective world.

Suggestions play a very important role in keeping the cerebral function down and in inducing disorder in cognitive activities. Such reduced psychic states of the brain pave the way for various forms of deceptive perceptions, of illusions and hallucinations. Development of Second Signal System in

EXTRA SENSORY PERCEPTION

TELEPATHY AND CLAIRVOYANCE: Telepathy is the alleged communication between one mind and another other than through the ordinary sense channels. Clairvoyance is the supposed faculty of "seeing" objects or events which, by reason of space and time or other cause, are not discernible through the ordinary sense of vision.

Dr. J. B. Rhine of Duke University, North Carolina, used the term extra-sensory perception (abbreviated to ESP) to include telepathy, clairvoyance and precognition. His studies also include what is described as the P. K. effect or psychokinesis, the supposed influence of the human mind on the movement of physical bodies. The Psi force is the term used for the faculty behind ESP and PK.

PSYCHIC RESEARCH is the scientific study of the so-called psychic phenomena as contrasted with spiritualism which is the cult

of those who already believe in their supernatural nature. It is obviously impossible here to summarise work that has been carried out on such subjects as mediumship, apparitions, telepathy and clairvoyance, poltergeists, levitation and precognition.

RELIGIOUS MAN, A BAD WITNESS

So far as the human mind and the nature of scientific evidence are concerned the following points may be made :

1. There is little use in discussing psychic phenomena until we realise that almost no human being—least of all one with strong convictions—is a completely trustworthy witness. A person may be utterly honest in every other respect except that in which his convictions are involved.

(Continued from page 116)

human beings enhanced the power of suggestion through words, written or unwritten, forms of paintings and figures of gods, godmen, saints and stories of their miracles and wonderful deeds. This accounts for the increasing incidence of miracles being experienced by unimaginably large section of people far and near.

Miracles have no objective reality. They are the results of deceptive perception arising out of numerous situations. They are the working of deranged cerebral functions of people—the perceivers all around.

The innocent and the gullibles experience miracles out of their deranged 'conditions'. The Crooks and the Cheats make Miracles, out of their wickedness. And that is all there is to it ! ☐

2. This does not mean that a witness is either telling the whole truth or is simply lying; for the following possibilities exist: (a) he may be telling the truth, (b) he may be consciously lying for motives of his own, (c) his recollections may be incorrect in discussing something that happened in the past, (d) he may really believe that he saw or heard what he said he did and may be telling the truth as he experienced it—e.g. seeing a ghost—without realising that what he experienced is a product of his own unconscious mind, (e) there are various degrees of lying, for the mind has a natural tendency to add coherence and meaning to the only partly coherent events of the day, and it is a normal trait (consciously or unconsciously) to make a “good story” out of what originally were isolated and unconnected happenings, (f) under the most favourable conditions the evidence of scientifically-trained people is not as good as it should be (The psychological experiment in which a class of students is suddenly exposed to a deliberately contrived scene, e.g. two men eccentrically dressed rush into the lecture room, exchange words, and have a quarrel—and the students are afterwards required to write down what they saw and heard. Rarely 10 per cent., even 70 per cent. will be correct as to what really happened).

SPIRITUAL HEALING

3. There are many aspects of “psychic” phenomena which are not “psychic” at all, but based on well-known scientific principles. How many people, for example, know: (a) that every physical illness has its psychological aspect, so that a person with chronic arthritis, let us say, may get up and walk

for the first time in years after injection with a new drug which is later proved to be worthless or no better than aspirin (e.g. cortisone), yet if a “spiritual healer” got the same results he would be acclaimed for his psychic powers, (b) that it is possible to be completely paralysed, totally blind or deaf, have total loss of sensation in some part of the body, have two or more personalities without any physical diseases being present, in the neurosis (cured daily by psychiatrist, without mystery) known as hysteria.

BLISTERS UNDER HYPNOSIS

4. It is possible under hypnosis, or self-hypnosis, to produce stigmata—e.g. marks resembling the nail-prints of the Crucifixion on hands and feet, to produce blisters at Will, spontaneous bleeding and many of the phenomena usually described as miraculous, in the consulting room and by scientific means.

5. We all have more potent senses than we ordinarily realise. We may not consciously know the number of steps leading to our flat, but can be made under hypnosis to tell. Furthermore, there are people who are hyper-sensitive in hearing and vision (often without being aware of it), so that in “thought-transference” experiments where they are sent to another room whilst others decide on some object or idea, they may subconsciously hear what is going on; or in card experiments in telepathy they may be able to read the face of the card reflected in the pupils of the “sender” opposite, or tell in a familiar pack which card is which from almost invisible differences on the backs of the cards.

LAW OF PROBABILITY

6. Most of us have no idea of the mathematical laws of probability and are therefore likely to misinterpret the "mysteriousness" of phenomena. Thus, suppose I have a "premonition" that someone had died and later find my feelings confirmed by the event, then I may not remember or know (a) that on many previous occasions I, in common with most other people have had "premonitions" the vast majority of which did not come true, (b) that on the last occasion I saw the person, or from things I may have heard, I may have unconsciously noted signs that all was not well and expected the event, (c) that the most "improbable" things happen quite normally (e.g. during the last war a flying bomb fell through the roof of the British Museum and failed to explode, and some time later a second flying bomb fell through the same hole and likewise failed to explode), (d) that the chance of a pack of cards being dealt so that each of four persons receives a complete suit is exactly the same as the chance that any other combination of cards may come up.

COLLECTIVE HALLUCINATION

7. Collective hallucinosis does occur. How is it possible for the sun to stand still in the sky in the presence of thousands of people collected in a particular area when it is seen nowhere else in the world and has been noted by no astronomical laboratory?

8. Mediums have been proved to be prepared to do the most extraordinary things in order to deceive a suggestible audience seated in semi-darkness—e.g. the so-called "ectoplasm" (a supposedly psychic substance

or materialisation) which exudes from the medium's body has been found before the seance, as have "apports" or objects apparently appearing from nowhere, half-way down the medium throughout or in the stomach ready to be regurgitated, and even in other bodily apertures.

KOESTLER AND GELLER

Arthur Koestler, an ardent believer himself had to admit: 'However promising the subject, however impressive his past scoring record, there is no certainty that at the next experimental session his ESP faculty will work'. How does one know that the few correct perceptions recorded by him were not either coincidences or the tricks played by persons like Uri Geller on gullibles?

It is also conceded that such phenomena can be (and have been) demonstrated only to those who believe in the 'blessed individual'. The presence of sceptics is sufficient to prevent the phenomena from occurring, they accept. If such powers exist, they exist irrespective of the beliefs of the audience. On the other hand, it is superfluous to claim to have exhibited it to blind believers who never needed any proof and who are content to presume and imagine such phenomena.

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Dr. Kovoov Answers . . .

- Q. Can planetary movements have any effect on humanity and plant life?
- A. Sun and moon being very close to the earth when compared to the planets and stars, have a lot of influence on the living and the non-living on the earth. Without solar energy life would not have originated on our planet. Because of this, it is utter foolishness to say that the sun, moon and the planets guide the destinies of organisms according to their perspective (not real) positions at their birth.
- Q. What is the difference between yoga and hypnotism?
- A. Yoga is an Indian system of physical culture, whereas hypnotism is a system of induction of psychic and psychosomatic changes in a person through suggestion. Numerous absurd and fictitious claims attributed to various types of yogas can have hypnotic effects on suggestible yogis.
- Q. Why should there be constant tussle between intellect and emotions?
- A. Emotions are congenital and instinctive, whereas intellect is acquired.



Emotions are curbed through inhibitions which are acquired through the intellect. Since inhibitions oppose emotions there should naturally be a tussle between intellect and emotions.

Q. Is compulsory family planning and abortion rational and ethical?

A. Abortion is getting rid of an unwanted internal parasite-foetus from the body of a woman. For a woman who wants to have a baby, the foetus in her womb is a wanted parasite. Abortioning a wanted

foetus from the womb of a mother by compulsion is wrong because it is an act against the personal freedom of the individual. While not compelling a woman to abort the foetus in her womb, it should be made compulsory for doctors to abort the unwanted foetus from a woman who likes to get rid of it.

Q. Is rationalism necessary for the benefit of mankind?

A. It is absolutely necessary.

Murthy, Madras.

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ANNOUNCEMENT

We are glad to announce that the Study Course on Rationalism commencing on May 13, 1977 will be inaugurated by

Mr. Justice S. Mohan.

News and Notes

SETTING THE CLOCK BACK

The previous government did well during the emergency through the family planning drive launched on a large scale. The illiterate, ignorant and innocent people however did not realize that the efforts were in their own interest. Some Communal-cum-political parties were ready to exaggerate things and exploit the situation to their advantage.

Immediately after taking office, Mr. Raj Narain, the Minister for Health and Family Planning has said "Sterilization is an inhuman method not in tune with India's culture and customs"! According to newspaper reports, he had also suggested that new types of family planning posters be brought out based on India's ancient culture and civilization and the tenets of different religions!

In the interim budget for 1977-78, the amount set apart for family planning is Rs. 26 crores less than that in the revised budget for 1976-77.

If the above points are any indication, it can be taken for granted that India's future is doomed. It is hoped that the Government take decisions on economic considerations instead of religious factors.

* * *

Here is a News item from Daily Hindu Milap of 23-1-77.

In the village Panjguraini, a saint who was called 'virji' (meaning respected brother) has been arrested for brain washing the adolescents of both sexes. He was also accused of using the boys and girls for his sexual gratification. The villagers reported to the police that four children were missing for some days and that they suspected the saint.

Sometime ago, the so-called virgi came to Banga along with his disciples. He used to call boys and girls of adolescent age at odd hours. And when these 'devotees' were inside, the disciples would not allow other people to go inside."

What a pity it is that when there is so much nonsense and morbid sex in religion, leaders of the day ask people to follow and respect these saints (?) in the name of tradition. We are told that these 'saints' are the glory of the country and it is they who are to remove the evils from the society. Don't we know where these pedlars in religion will lead this society which has already been eaten into its vitals by such religious parasites, devilish 'saints' and pious beggars?

Miss. Soma Sublok, Banga.

AN ACKNOWLEDGEMENT AND AN APPEAL

We are grateful to the following for their generous donations received during the month of March, 1977 :—

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